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PREVIEW

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PREVIEW

MILITARY BRATS/THIRD CULTURE KIDS: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL
STUDY OF THE EFFECTS OF BEING RAISED IN THE MILITARY

A dissertation submitted

by

PATRICIA SHEALY

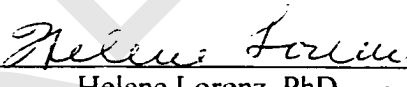
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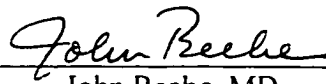
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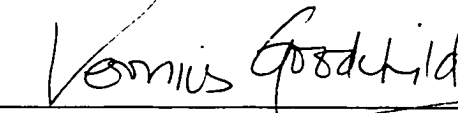
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ABSTRACT

Military Brats/Third Culture Kids: A Phenomenological Study of the Effects of Being Raised in the Military

by

Patricia Shealy

The military is a large, complex organization established for the purpose of training soldiers in the best and most effective ways to protect, fight, and defend our nation, even to death. That is to say, men and women are trained in the practice of violence. Inside the larger military structure grows the less visible subculture of military spouses and children. Children of military parents are often referred to as Military brats, Army brats, Air Force brats and other derivations specific to particular branches of service. How are children affected by the lived experience of growing up inside a veritable war machine? How does the shadow of violence translate into their adult psyches and souls?

Heuristic and phenomenological research methodology was used to explore the quality and lived experiences of a small study group comprised of five men and five women. Dialogic interviews were recorded and transcribed. The interview candidates received a copy of their interview and were invited to comment on, change, modify, or clarify any part of their personal story. From multiple interviews and personal experience, I have identified 11 themes common to the military brats with whom I spoke.

The common military brat themes are as follows: (1) rootlessness and a sense of not belonging exemplified by the Greek god Hermes, god of borders, boundaries, and the journey; (2) aloneness, loneliness, and a sense of detachment and difference from the civilian collective, exemplified by the archetype of the Orphan; alone but special; (3) military dependents, traps and bonds; (4) identification with and reenactment of the warrior hero's attitudes and behaviors; (5) citizens of the world, cultural diversity and tolerance; (6) drug and alcohol abuse; (7) depression, anger and rage; (8) sexual promiscuity; (9) difficulties with commitment; come here; go away; (10) a conflicted inner sense of self; and (11) archetypal shadow defenses and self care systems.

"I object to violence because when it appears to do good, the good is only temporary; the evil it does is permanent."

--Mahatma Gandhi

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It is said that the people whose paths cross our own are people we need for the special lessons we have requested in this lifetime. There are special souls, friends, and teachers whose love and commitment have helped to make my life and academic journey both rich and real, and without whose help and support I would not have been able to accomplish this.

My mother Corean V. Shealy, better known as Pinky, opened her heart and home to me, providing a safe and perfect place from which to explore and write about my life experiences. She epitomizes the expression unconditional love. Her unwavering faith in God and daily prayers for me continues to hold me up. Without her love and support, this would not have been possible. Thank you, Mom, I love you.

Bobbie Harvey has been a brilliant editor and a patient, compassionate friend throughout this entire process. I have learned something new about trust, friendship, honesty, promises, and commitment from your steady and reliable presence in my life. I am a far better person for knowing you. Thank you so much.

My brothers, Thomas, George, and Robert, have each in their own unique and sometimes troubling ways taught me much about myself. I am grateful for your presence in my life.

I want to acknowledge the presence and guidance from all the ancestors, spirits, angels, and the palpable hearts and souls of those who have gone before me. They

include my father, “the Colonel,” Jesus, grandparents, and great grandparents, Hermes, and all the past World War II, Korean War, Vietnam, Cold War, and Gulf War veterans and their families, all of whom made unique and important contributions to this world.

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DEDICATION

For my children Michael and Brett,
kind, gentle, tender souls
whose willingness to support me throughout this
personal journey has made it possible, and for the love from and for
them. They are truly God's greatest gift to me in this life.

And

For the many exceptional military brats, fellow journeyers,
who opened their hearts and homes to me
in a way that allowed me the privilege
of intimate communion with them.

This is for you.

I thank you with my heart.

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The style used throughout this dissertation is in accordance with the Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association (Fifth Edition, 2001) and the Pacifica Graduate Institute's Depth Psychology Dissertation Handbook (2001-2002).

Chapter 1

Introduction

Personal Demonstration-Protest Against Violence

I sit around a large oval-shaped table with 15 strangers. There is quiet conversation as we eat our community-prepared evening meal. I am part of and yet I am separate from. I listen to discussions about recent political events; the threat of a pre-emptive first strike attack against Iraq; the recent death of a Democratic Senator, his wife and child, while on the campaign trail; the recent demonstration in Washington D.C. promoting peace, denouncing war. A small group at the head of the table talk about a friend of theirs, a woman, who is serving 6 months in jail for stepping over the line during a demonstration against a military base that trains foreign military persons in the skills of guerilla warfare. It was a peaceful demonstration of civil disobedience. The price for her strong opinion and demonstration against such practices landed her, and others, in jail.

I listen in great astonishment as ex-Catholic Nuns, spiritual women and men, nod their heads, seeming to understand that sometimes you must put yourself on the line for what you believe. A few are present who were also at this annual demonstration that was apparently very well organized and attended. Peace is a precious and valuable gift to those who understand the alternatives. Men and women took valuable time from their daily existences to stand up against violence and its promotion. When I heard them speak about the concept of protesting what you don't agree with or

demonstrating against war, I was suddenly awakened to the reality of personal responsibility and this was something very disturbing and powerful to me. We either participate in life or we are not-so-innocent-bystanders, watching the events of the world passively, indifferently, unconsciously, unsympathetically.

I am transported back in time. I am 18 and on my way to college. I have been living in Europe for the last 7 years and have little or no comprehension, knowledge, or understanding about the America we represented as a military family in a foreign land. I am the epitome of the stupid blonde girl. Southern Florida was a radical departure from Germany for me. Sudden newfound freedom far from the direct supervision of parents and the military was more terrifying than exciting. The Vietnam War was going on. I knew there were some young men who went right into the military following high school graduation, but I didn't really know anyone in particular who was there. I didn't even know where Viet Nam was. It was as if it didn't really exist in my world or reality. My father gave me strict orders not to go to any of the anti-war demonstrations that might happen at my school. He said that if I did, FBI, CIA, or military police would collect information and photographs of the people there; that I would then be on their militant list of people against the military. He said it would not be a good thing for me to go to any rallies, that it could be dangerous for me and potentially for him and our family. He said if I did, there would be negative consequences for me. He told me that the intelligence collectors would keep a file on me for the rest of my life and it could come back to interfere with my choices later on.

It is embarrassing and humiliating to realize how numb and controlled I allowed myself to be. I did not attend any anti-war rallies, demonstrations, or protests. There were many going on in many places. The Vietnam War happened and passed without my conscious awareness or participation in it at any level. I was disenfranchised, exiled from the masses, separated from the truth about the horrors that were going on. I pretended, in some ways, to be above it. It did not affect me directly. I turned a deaf ear and a blind eye. I pretended that everything was fine when in fact a tragedy was occurring among my peers. I was consumed with my undergraduate degree and my soon-to-be husband, whose parents arranged to have a doctor friend write a medical deferment for him when his draft number came up. He was one of the lucky young men who completely escaped the horrors of war. I am ashamed of my passive disinterest in, denial about, and dissociation from what was happening all around me. How could I have slept through such a horrendous event? Like a good military daughter, I did as I was told. Military training had a familial ripple effect that left its indelible mark deeply imbedded in my soul. I relinquished my responsibility as an American citizen. I did not have to be accountable for decisions I didn't make. What difference could one person make, anyway?

Shame filled me as I sat at that table. I felt shame for my too easily accepted perception of powerlessness. Individuation is the process of breaking away from parental and societal controls and establishing oneself as an autonomous, independent thinking, productive member of society. This dissertation is my demonstration, my protest against violence, war, and hatred. Recent readings of Gandhi's words and

reflections resonate inside me. I want to acknowledge our ancestor, Gandhi, and his life-works that were devoted to nonviolence, truth, self-discipline, passive resistance, civil disobedience, and love of all mankind without distinctions. Gandhi said that it was easy for weak people to practice nonviolence, but the success of this concept would only be seen when the strong practice nonviolence. He maintained that nonviolence by the strong is the strongest force in the world. In the same way that violence invites violence, nonviolence also invites itself. He says that training for violence is for protecting external things but that training for nonviolence is a personal, inner issue of integrity, purpose, honor, and involves a quality of self-sacrifice. In order to practice nonviolence you must believe in nonviolence and the inherent value of human life.

The process of researching this paper has brought me to a place I could not have imagined. My rebellion, protest, written demonstration is against the injustices, wrongs, pain, sorrow, suffering, lack of consideration, disregard, discounting, dismissing; the subtle and obvious violence that we as military children experienced inside a system that trained our fathers and mothers toward violence. Promotion of war and the financing of the American war-machine threaten to move us closer to the total annihilation of our planet. Another war implies the imminent use of nuclear weapons that can cause unthinkable destruction. Our president wants to start this action, strike first. Out of families where violence and force are used to control its members come the future soldiers and mothers of tomorrow. For each child who is unjustifiably injured with anger, another checkmark is added to the pro-war column.

We invariably learn what we live. The military system has been a breeding ground for angry, injured people who will eventually express themselves one way or another.

I am angry at being raised under an umbrella whose spokes included violence, intimidation, disrespect, control, and threats. I am angry at the system, the government that places a greater value on money, property, prestige, and oil than on human rights. Not one child should have to suffer at the hands of parents who are trained in violence for the greater good of America. Not one child should suffer at the universal hands of a self-propelling, for-profit, war-machine. Sacrifice of innocent children because governments need to be in control, to achieve an illusion of power, is unacceptable. I have been so conflicted throughout this research and writing process because to speak of my military childhood experience was like committing blasphemy--a blasphemy against the military war gods, one that is punishable by death. A blaspheme of the warrior/hero/soldier/father who did serve a noble cause, who did risk his life for my freedom, who did work hard and provide well. The decorated Air Force Colonel, despite his commendable service record, treated his only daughter with the same anger, impatience, disdain, and malice he might have held for what he would call a *Kraut* during the war. We were not the enemy. I was not the enemy. I was a child.

Before we start planning to attack outside our borders, perhaps we should concentrate on what is wrong with our homeland. We cannot impart that which we do not have. America needs to clean up her inner act before presuming egotistical, arrogant superiority over other nations and countries. There is a Bible verse that I

paraphrase here: Before you try to take the speck out of your brother's eye, take the plank out of your own eye. America, we the people have work to do within our own borders as well as humanitarian responsibilities to all children, the hope of our future, everywhere. We need to look within: within our individual hearts, souls, and intentions: within our collective consciousness as a country. Violence perpetuates violence. We need to stop!

In the larger, more universal issues of war, the pain and suffering that it brings to children everywhere, is a world tragedy of enormous depth. War leaves emotional as well as physical scars on our children. The traumatic residual consequence of wars causes long-term developmental delays and multiple other difficulties. A UNICEF.org Internet report called "Voices of Youth" states that war harms everyone, especially children. The report provides alarming statistics:

Armed conflicts are a global scourge with devastating effects on children. Estimated numbers of child victims of armed conflicts during the past decade: killed: two million; disabled: four-five million; left homeless: 12 million; orphaned or separated from their families: more than one million; and psychologically traumatized: some 10 million. Additionally, in some 25 countries, thousands of children under age 16 have fought in wars. In 1988 alone, there were as many as 200,000 child combatants. (UNICEF.org, Voices of Youth, (2002), online)

From the American Department of Veteran Affairs, Office of Public Affairs in Washington, D.C. come the following statistics about children who are on the Dependents Compensation and Pension rolls as of May 2001:

Children from World War I: 5,810; World War II: 18,707; Korean Conflict: 4,110; Vietnam Era: 13,465; and the Gulf War: 8,508. Surviving Spouses from World War I: 25,573; World War II: 272,793; Korean Conflict: 63,579; Vietnam Era: 114,514; and the Gulf War: 6,261. (online)

I am mindful of the fact that for each surviving spouse indicated, there are a corresponding number of children who lost a parent. These numbers are not available.

In 1990, UNICEF estimated that about 80% of war casualties are women and children. James Garbarino writes in *Children in War Zones* (Coordinators' Notebook No. 10, 1991, an article):

Every military action has direct and indirect implications for the lives and well being of childrenWhen our soldiers kill other people's soldiers, they kill fathers and brothers. When civilians are killed "accidentally" in the crossfire, or intentionally as part of attacks on "infrastructure," children and their mothers are among them ...Every day around the world, children are hurt by weapons manufactured and sold in and by the United States. Some of these weapons are sold as part of our economic lifeblood. Others are paid for by taxpayers and given away as a matter of geopolitical strategy and as part of our military aid policiesWe know that "projecting military force" leads to child casualties (pp.1-5).

War is not good for children anywhere. Militarism, violence, and the destruction of life, in multiple ways, cause pain, suffering, and sorrow for all children whose lives are affected by them. Violence destroys children--children who represent the archetypal innocence, trust, and vulnerability that inspire hope and faith for a deeply troubled world. Children raised in the military have a particularly challenging combination of issues to address.

Statement of the Problem

How does the experience of being raised in the U.S. military affect one's adult life? Over four million children have been raised on military bases around the world, under the focused gaze of the warrior father. Even if the warrior was physically

absent, as is often the case, his powerful influence was present. Their shared experiences have shaped their lives so powerfully that they are forever different from their fellow Americans. These American “military brats” were raised under circumstances unique to human history. They lived on the edge of history in the making, attending the Nuremberg Trials, being evacuated from Libya during the Six-Day War, and studying in the shadows of Dachau and Hiroshima. I personally remember my father’s mysterious disappearance during the Cuban Missile crisis.

Military brats experience a combination of unusual experiences. Many military brats, especially overseas military brats, grew up in integrated military schools and neighborhoods 20 years before the Civil Rights movement took hold in America. These overseas military brats moved around the world, rarely getting to know their extended family. They lost friends, identity, and social status regularly because the military rotates service duty stations every 2 to 3 years. This moving requires a fresh start, beginning again at each new location. They lived in a series of “hometown” military bases with no permanent members, often in the middle of a foreign country, then were forced to leave the base once they graduated from high school or their military parent retired or died. They lived a near-collective existence (free health care, subsidized housing) under a totalitarian structure that exhorts democracy but does not allow freedom of speech or association. They suffered prolonged father (or more recently mother) absence in an authoritarian, militaristic patriarchy, constantly preparing for war. Many were exposed to a plethora of art, history, and culture that most American children only read about.

This unusual combination of experiences has created, for the overseas military brats, a cultural identity so powerful it crosses all lines of race, gender, age, and class. Until the Internet surfaced a few years ago, enabling them to reconnect, reunite, and compare notes, most military brats didn't even know they belonged to a separate subculture. They just felt "different," somehow, from their fellow Americans. The similarities that the military brats discovered are astounding. They range from seemingly innocuous personality quirks to major values, choices, and expectations about life. Some of the psychological legacies are inspiring, others bittersweet. For many, reconnecting with their fellow military brats and recognizing their unique heritage has been the first time they have felt like they belonged. The extended military brat community has become the first "hometown" they have ever known. They identify with and acknowledge each other as family because of their common experiences of being raised in the military.

Currently increased attention is being paid to the parents of these children, veterans of World War II and the Great Depression of the 1930s/1940s. Movies such as *Saving Private Ryan* (Spielberg, 1998) and *Pearl Harbor* (Bay, 2001) are taut with heroism and sacrifices that they, as a generation, made. The recent attention being paid to the construction of the World War II memorial in Washington D.C. and its proper location in relationship to the other war memorials, including the Vietnam Wall, is in the news. Many famous and not so famous people have taken up the cause to ensure that the courageous World War II veterans are appropriately honored and celebrated. Recently Steven Spielberg and Tom Hanks (2001) acted and directed a